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NEWS RELEASE

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LEGISLATIVE LEADERS ANNOUNCE PLANS TO ADD 300 NEW JOBS IN LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES

FEDERAL STIMULUS DOLLARS, STATE FUNDS TO IMPROVE STAFFING LEVELS

(SALEM) -- Elderly and disabled residents in Oregon's long term care facilities will get a much needed boost in staffing levels through a program announced today by Legislative leaders and long term care advocates.

Using a combination of state funds and federal stimulus dollars, House Speaker Dave Hunt and Senate President Peter Courtney joined with Dr. Bruce Goldberg of the Department of Human Services and long term care advocates to announce the state will move forward with plans to help pay for 300 new certified nursing assistants to work in long term care facilities across the state. The new staffing levels – recommended by a Governor's Task force in 2007 and approved by the Legislature – go into effect on Wednesday, April 1.

“We are making an investment in the health of Oregon, both our physical health and our economic health,” said Senate President Peter Courtney. “We are maximizing federal stimulus dollars to create jobs all across Oregon while at the same time providing better care for our vulnerable senior citizens and expanding our state's workforce in one of the most dynamic and growing industries in the world – health care.”

Hunt said this program is a perfect example of smart investments the state can make – even in the face of economic crisis – that provides both short and long term benefits for Oregonians.

“This creates jobs right away; good-paying jobs that offer an opportunity for advancement. And we are reaffirming our commitment to long term care for disabled and elderly Oregonians, making their life a little bit better,” said Hunt. “It's a win-win for Oregon, especially when you add in the federal stimulus dollars that more than match our state investment.”

Dr. Goldberg, who joined with the Ways and Means Co-Chairs Peter Buckley and Margaret Carter to advocate for keeping the increase in staffing levels during the 07-09 budget rebalance, said the federal match was significantly increased as part of the stimulus package. Now the state receives \$2.64 for every dollar it invests, compared to \$1.62 prior to the stimulus package.

“These 300 jobs are an important part of what we do at DHS – keep people safe. And we know that increased staffing does that. Facilities with greater staffing levels generate fewer adult protective services investigations,” said Goldberg. “We also know that these jobs epitomize how DHS is an economic engine for Oregon. They will join the 55,000 other jobs – mostly private sector – that are funded through our agency.”

These jobs, according to an AARP representative, assure elderly and disabled Oregonians will get better care at the same time the new workers provide an economic boost to their communities,

“While Oregon has a proud history of home and community-based care, nursing homes play a critical role in our overall long-term care system when individuals or their loved ones need a certain level of care,” said Rick Bennett, Director of Government Relations for AARP Oregon and Nursing Facility Staffing Commission member. “This agreement is good for our economy, good for our communities, and good for our most vulnerable seniors and people with disabilities and their families.”

Nursing home managers and certified nurse assistants also welcome the boost in staffing levels.

"We are so appreciative that these new hires will take place," said Valerie Martinez, a member of SEIU Local 503 who is a certified nursing assistant at the Evergreen Windsor Health and Rehabilitation Center in Salem.

"This will mean so much for the patients and those of us who provide their direct around-the-clock care. I love my job and I know the new CNAs who will come in as a result of this funding will feel the same way."

“This commitment is going to create jobs and improve the quality of care for the people we serve. This action will create jobs for 300 people across the state, many of them women, and provide them the opportunity to enter a very valuable and rewarding profession as a certified nursing assistant," said Sandi Sledge, Director of Nursing at Avamere Court at Keizer, a nursing facility in Keizer.